(b) Coal is imported by the consumers due to (i) non availability/ inadequate availability of the required quality indigenously, (ii) for use by blending with indigenous coal on environmental consideration and (iii) considerations of cost. Domestic coal is cheaper at pithead per tonnes basis. However, domestic coal becomes uncompetitive per tonne basis in certain littoral areas due to high Railway freight and low heat content of indigenous coal.

(c) Indian coal, in general, by virtue of its drift origin is having high ash content as coaly matter is intimately mixed with mineral matter during formation stage. Further, reserve of low ash content coking & non-coking coal is very limited in India.

In contrast, mineral matter content in coal from most other coal producing countries is low due to *in-situ* origin of its formation. Hence, the imported coal is superior in calorific value and is having low ash content.

As a consequence, steel/pig iron plants using blast furnace, soda ash manufacturers, ferro-alloys industries as well as merchand cokeries are importing low ash coking coal/low ash metallurgical coke (LAMC) since the same are not available as per qualitative and quantitative requirements indigenously.

Moreover, corex plants and certain captive power plants (like Malco) are also importing low ash non-coking coal due to availability of limited quantity of superior grade non-coking coal indigenously.

Some cement plants are also importing non-coking coal on considerations of cost-economics and logistics.

Due to non-availability of sufficient quantity of low ash coking coal, integrated steel plants are also importing coking coal in bulk.

Raw coal offtake in tonnage from CIL has not suffered on account of imports and the same has steadily gone up year to year since 1992-93 upto current period (barring 1998-99 when there was industrial recession in the country).

Exploration of Methane Gas

2832. MISS MABEL REBELLO: Will the Minister of COAL AND MINES be pleased to state:

(a) the number of coal mines identified till date, for the exploration of Methane gas;

(b) the private companies going to be involved in the exploration;

(c) the amount of money already invested in the process; and

(d) by when the exploration of Methane gas is planned to begin in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL AND MINES (SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD): (a) Two coal mines *viz.* Sudamdih and Moonidih of BCCL have been identified. Ministry of Coal & Mines has undertaken a demonstration project under S&T for recovery and commercial utilisation of Coal Bed methane, with UNDP/GEF grant funding in these mines.

(b) The Government has awarded eight blocks situated in the five coal fields in non-mining areas in the country for exploration and production of Coal Bed Methane as under:—

1.	Raniganj Coalfield (West Bengal)	-	3 blocks
2.	Jharia Coalfield (Jharkhand)	-	1 block
3.	Sohagpur Coalfield (Madhya Pradesh)	-	2 blocks
4.	Bokaro Coalfield (Jharkhand)	-	1 block
5.	North Karanpura Coalfield (Jharkhand)	-	1 block

Out of eight blocks awarded, four blocks have been awarded to private companies as under:—

1.	Reliance Industries Ltd.	-	2 blocks
2.	Essar Oil Ltd.	-	1 block
3.	Great Eastern Energy Corpn. Ltd. (GEECL)	-	1 block

(c) and (d) Till June, 2002, a total US$ 2.652 million and Rs. 0.04 crore have been spent on the demonstration project (UNDP/GEF) for recovery and commercial utilisation of Coal Bed Methane.

While, ONGC has undertaken exploratory Research and Development (R&D) work in West Bengal and Jharkhand state and have invested around Rs.70 crores for initial assessment of CBM

potential in the area; M/s. GEECL has invested about Rs. 7 crores in the block awarded to it.

The exploration work can be started by the awardee company as per the provisions of the respective contracts after grant of Petroleum Exploration License (PEL) by the State Government concerned.

Expenditure by the Officials of CIL on Foreign Travel

2833. SHRI K.B. KRISHNAMURTHY: Will the Minister of COAL AND MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether expenditure by the officials of Coal India Limited and its subsidiaries on foreign travel during the year 2000-2001 has come under severe censure by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India in his report for the year 2002;

(b) is so, a gist of comments made by the CAG in this regard; and

(c) what is the extent of loss to the national exchequer on account of these foreign visits by the officials of the CIL/subsidiaries, as estimated by the CAG in his report?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL AND MINES (SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The gist of CAGs comments on the expenditure on foreign travel by officials of CIL and its subsidiaries is as under:

Para No.	Comments
2.1.1	Excess payment of per diem allowance/daily allowance and entertainment allowance.
2.1.2	Excess payment of airport free allowance.
2.1.3	Payment of personal expenses.
2.1.4	Excess payment to DA during training period
2.1.5	Non-rendition of accounts.
2.1.6	Adjustment of expenses incurred on visit to countries not authorised.
2.1.7	Tour without approval of the competent authority.
2.1.8	Non-submission of TA bills.